

Lutheran Woman

April 2007

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Divine Inspiration
Is That You, God?

Our Images of God
This is the Night



CHOCOLATE LOVERS,
PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE
YOUR MOUTH IS.



We did.

AT LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF, WE BELIEVE IN LEADING BY EXAMPLE. THAT'S WHY, TO SUPPORT THE FAIR TRADE COCOA FARMERS OF KUAPA KOKOO IN GHANA, WE BECAME AN OWNER OF DIVINE CHOCOLATE — THE FIRST FARMER-OWNED BRAND OF CHOCOLATE IN THE WORLD. BY UNITING FARMERS, SHAREHOLDERS AND CONSUMERS, THE GOOD WE CAN ACCOMPLISH IS SWEET INDEED. VISIT LWR.ORG/CHOCOLATE TO LEARN HOW YOU CAN SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS.





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LET US PRAY

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 03 APRIL 2007

God knows that communication is key to a healthy relationship. Prayer is God's gift to us, and when we speak and hear, listen and respond, we are changed and so is the world.

6 Divine Inspiration

Nearly half the people in America joke that they need chocolate to survive. Without our Fair Trade purchases, the lives of many cocoa farmers really would be at stake. *Kattie Somerfeld*

13 This is the Night: The Easter Vigil

Birth and death are more than the beginning and ending points on the line of our earthly journey. They are moments in our quest to reach the risen Savior. *Bryan M. Cones*

22 Our Images of God

The Bible offers us many images of God, from shepherd to mother bear. The way we see God usually comes from our life experiences and may change as we grow. *Audrey West*

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How can you be sure it is God's voice calling your name, God answering your prayers, God showing up to speak to you even when there is a crowd around? *Sue Gamelin*

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The Victims among Us An estimated 14,000 to 17,000 people are trafficked into the United States each year, and 30 to 50 percent of them are children. *Nikki Massie*
Love Your Neighbor: Battling Crimes against Humanity Commercial sexual exploitation includes the businesses of prostitution, pornography, and stripping. What can we do to stop it? *Terri Lackey*

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VOICES

To Whom We Pray

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

Do you ever find yourself daydreaming about God? I do—unfortunately, sometimes during the sermon at church. If you do, what images come to mind? The Good Shepherd? An old man with a flowing white beard? Jesus, as portrayed in the various (and sometimes sappy) depictions of the Last Supper? In *Bird by Bird*, writer Anne Lamott offers a description of “God as a high school principal in a gray suit who never remembered your name but is always leafing unhappily through your files.” How do you pray to a God like that? “Please, don’t put that on my permanent record. I promise to do better”? However you imagine God, your prayer life will be influenced by it.

In this issue, the Bible study writers look at prayer in times of suffering: “Whenever there is pain and suffering, prayers are offered. But how we think about the relationship between prayers and suffering depends a great deal on the *kind of God* to whom we pray.”

What kind of God hears our prayers? Audrey West in “Our Images of God” imagines “a conversation among the biblical writers, as if they were answering the question, ‘Who is God for you?’ ‘God is my shepherd,’ the psalmist says. . . . Hosea chimes in, ‘God is like a mother bear.’ . . . Nearly every writer in the canon adds something to the discussion.”

Whatever our image, we know that communication is key to our relationship with God. And it is not a one-way street. Not only do we reach out to God in prayer—God reaches out to us, too.

In “Is That You, God?” Sue Gamelin encourages us to wait attentively for the voice of God: “Listen, my sisters, when you pray. Talk with others when you are uncertain about what you’ve heard. . . . And don’t be afraid to say, ‘Speak, God, your servant is listening.’”

Sometimes when we listen, we are led into new ventures. Lutheran World Relief has decided to invest in a chocolate company. Why? LWR staff member Kattie Somerfeld writes, “It’s good for the farmers, good for the Fair Trade movement, and good for Lutherans.” You can learn more in “Divine Inspiration,” on page 6.

When we pray and listen, our hearts can be moved to concern for people whose suffering is hard to think about, much less talk about. In this issue, you will read about commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. These are difficult topics, but may our hearts be turned to compassion and advocacy for those who are so vulnerable.

On your journey from Lent into Easter, you will want to read Bryan Cones’ reflection on the Easter Vigil service: “In joy we respond with the ‘alleluia’ from which we have fasted during Lent, or with a resounding ‘Glory to God in the highest.’ Standing with joy and thanksgiving, bathed in the light of Christ, we hear the resolution of our story: The Gospel account of Christ’s resurrection.”

May the blessings of resurrection and Easter be with you. 🌿

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You can write to her at LWT@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Spirit Prayers

by Marj Leegard

When we think about our most fervent prayers, our heads sometimes tell us, "God is about redemption, not intervention." But in our hearts, we almost take the redeeming for granted: Intervening is what we pray for most desperately. Life can shred us into pieces, rocking our foundations. It is then that our hearts turn to the most loved Bible verses.

"In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words" (Romans 8:26, CEV).

We recall the words of that verse from memory because our eyes are blurred with tears. Anger may engulf us. Our hearts may pound with fear. But memory whispers: "Remember the presence—the Spirit is already praying in ways more powerful than we can pray."

We don't have to summon the Spirit. The Spirit is already there, already praying. We don't have to understand, only trust. The Master Prayer is praying for us. As we are able and when we are able, we join in the litany.

When our daughter Laurie was small, she took great delight in going with me to the meetings of the area women's retreat committee. She was welcomed and even given work to do. We made signs for the prayer groups, and Laurie colored the signs.

When our two-day women's retreat began, she was not happy about being left behind. When I returned, she was full of questions. In place of telling a bedtime

story, I answered her questions. When she was finally sleepy, she asked, "Didn't any mothers bring their little girls?" I told her there had been some mothers and daughters there, but the daughters were all grown up. I said, "Let's pray that when you are grown up, we can go together to the retreat." With her eyes tightly closed, she prayed, "And I want to be on the committee!"

Those prayers were never answered in the way that we had asked. Some years after Laurie's death, we were on our way to family camp at Outlaw Ranch in South Dakota. We had Laurie's little daughter with us—something we never could have prayed for, since we had been so intent on our own plans. We haven't been on the committee yet, but with the Spirit leading, that committee meeting may come about in a glorious way someday.

I find myself wishing for one of the new prayer bracelets, the Protestant version of rosary beads. I need to be reminded when to pray and for what I should pray. I would need so many beads that my arm would drop off from carrying them around. I'm sure I'd wear my sleeves a little on the short side so that others would notice what a devoted woman I was. And then I'd have to add more beads to remind me of my sinfulness and need for forgiveness.

We all rest in the promise that when we cannot pray as we ought, the Spirit is already beside us. The Spirit prays and we join that prayer as we are able. 🌿

Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.



DIVINE INSPIRATION

by Kattie Somerfeld

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF JOINS WEST AFRICAN FARMERS IN BRINGING FAIRLY TRADED CHOCOLATE TO THE UNITED STATES

It is just before 5 a.m., and the sky is still dark over the Ghanaian countryside in West Africa. In thousands of houses, young boys are waking on hard floors and heading out to work on empty stomachs.



Throughout the Ivory Coast, thousands of children will be forced to work the cocoa fields today. Thousands more will labor as indentured servants. Scant food, no education, and little hope: This is the daily reality of many of the world's poorest children.

Prince is awake this morning as well. Yet unlike his peers, Prince knows that his day will not be filled with toil and abuse. He rises this day knowing that hope and opportunity have come to his community. For 14-year-old Prince, opportunity means education: He attends school for nine hours a day. He wants to help the community that is helping him achieve his dream of becoming a doctor. He now speaks not of servitude, but of serving others. Many of the ailments and diseases that have sickened and even killed people among his friends and family could have easily been treated with simple medications. "I am tired of losing people," he says. "I will help to keep my people alive."

ACTING BOLDLY

This is the story of Prince's community: a co-operative of Ghanaian cocoa farmers who have dared to transform their future. And this is also the story of our community: Lutherans throughout the United States who have pledged to support Fair Trade chocolate.

For as long as they can remember, the farmers of Kuapa Kokoo have toiled at the difficult work of growing, maintaining, and harvesting their cocoa crops, only to sell their cocoa beans at unfairly low prices and send them off to be turned into products they would never see or taste.

Yet what if things were different? What if the farmers themselves could own a chocolate company, thereby ensuring not only a fair price for their cocoa beans, but also a share of chocolate sales around the world? In a bold move, the farmers of Kuapa Kokoo did just that, creating the Day Chocolate Company, a British corporation, to produce Divine Chocolate. As co-owners (at 47 percent), the farmers are involved in business decisions from "bean to bar," and benefit not only when they sell their beans at a Fair Trade price, but again when they receive a share of the profits from the sales of cocoa products.

Kuapa's mission is to empower farmers in their efforts to gain a dignified livelihood, to increase women's participation in all of Kuapa's activities, and to develop environmentally friendly cultivation of cocoa. Their motto is "*pa pa pa*," "the best of the best," in the local Twi language. For these farmers, their business venture is about more than just money—Divine

Chocolate means dignity, empowerment, and freedom. By addressing the root causes that lead to severe poverty and child slavery in the cocoa industry, Kuapa is setting a bold example for farmers, corporations, and consumers around the world.

After eight years of successfully marketing their chocolate in Great Britain, these innovative farmers are bringing their dream to the United States. In support, Lutherans have stepped up to make this dream a reality.

Lutheran World Relief (LWR), in partnership with the more than 47,000 members of Kuapa Kokoo, is an initial investor in Divine Chocolate, USA. Through LWR's investment, Lutherans are now stakeholders in the world's only farmer-owned brand of chocolate.

CHOCOLATE WITH A HEART

Life is not easy for the thousands of small-scale cocoa farmers whose labor produces 90 percent of the world's cocoa. Working 16-hour days, walking miles through hot and dangerous tropical forests, they tend the delicate cocoa trees and protect them from pests and disease. For many, the fruit of their labor is bitter indeed. Forced to sell their beans at the current market price, most farmers struggle to support their families on less than two dollars a day.

ACT BOLDLY! EAT BOLDLY!

Consider your new role as part owner of Divine Chocolate. Here's how you can help make Divine Chocolate a success:

- Ordering is quick and easy at www.lwr.org/chocolate
- Sell Divine Chocolate at your church—give people in your congregation the opportunity to support Divine and enjoy the sweet taste of justice!
- Serve Divine Chocolate instead of the usual snacks for one coffee hour. Break up bars into small pieces or use Divine Chocolate to make heavenly treats with a heart—visit www.lwr.org/chocolate for recipes that are simply Divine!
- Teach young people about justice and Fair Trade by using the Divine Chocolate as a fundraiser—visit www.lwr.org/chocolate to download a free fundraising kit.
- Make Fair Trade a topic for discussion during youth and adult forums.
- Include Divine Chocolate in welcome baskets for new members, appreciation gifts for faithful volunteers, and as Christmas gifts.
- Bring Divine Chocolate to your grocery store—visit www.lwr.org/chocolate to learn how!



FAST FACTS!

- 90 percent of the world's cocoa is grown on small family farms of 12 acres or less.
- Lack of access to credit and poor market conditions often force small cocoa growers to sell to middlemen, receiving a fraction of their harvest's value.
- The U.S. chocolate industry generated \$13.7 billion in retail sales in 2000.
- Americans consumed 3.3 billion pounds of chocolate in 2000.

Courtesy of TransFair USA (www.transfairusa.org)

Some 46 percent of Americans joke they can't live without chocolate. Without Fair Trade, cocoa farming families literally can't live.

Low cocoa prices leave many farmers in desperate situations, forcing parents to keep their children out of school to work as farm laborers. More than 60 percent of the working children on West African cocoa farms are under the age of 14 and, while both boys and girls are employed in cocoa farming, girls are often less likely to attend school.

But life is changing for the farmers who are members of Kuapa Kokoo. With the higher sale price of their cocoa, Kuapa members have built clean wells, schools, and health clinics in their communities. They hold training sessions for farmers on improving cocoa quality and empower women to take equal part in all of the cooperative's activities.

The Kuapa members are looking toward the future of their communities and want to provide opportunities for generations to come. One such opportunity, Kuapa Kids Camp, engages students in such educational, social, and cultural initiatives as computer training, health classes, and gender education. Here, children have the opportunity to learn, play, and dream. Josephine, 12, dreams of one day becoming the general man-

ager of Kuapa Kokoo, helping farmers continue to extend their network and “take even better care of their families.” Empowered by education, 13-year-old Jocelyn is also thinking of her community. She wants to become a bank manager. That way, she says, she can “protect people from thieves who want to steal the money people work so hard to earn by raising cocoa.” At 14, Ruth can also see the improvements in her community during her household chores. Getting water once meant an hour-long trek; now she fetches her family’s daily supply of water from a pump Kuapa Kokoo built, only 10 minutes from her house. The time she saves can now be spent concentrating on school or studying science, her favorite subject.

A NEW KIND OF DEVELOPMENT

For more than 60 years, Lutheran World Relief has worked to respond to the needs of communities across the globe. Founded in 1945 as a relief agency that shipped material resources to war-torn Europe, LWR has continually evolved to creatively and effectively respond to emergencies, seek lasting solutions to poverty, and work for peace and justice.

Lutheran World Relief is now embarking on a development strategy that builds on the basic foundation of our develop-

ment and advocacy work. Working alongside farmers is not a new concept for Lutheran World Relief. Neither is promoting the concept and principles of Fair Trade. By investing in this farmer-owned company, Lutheran World Relief is investing in a model of trade for which it has advocated since the launch of its coffee project in 1997.

Why did Lutheran World Relief, a nonprofit organization with more than 60 years of experience in relief and development, decide to invest in a for-profit company? In short, because it’s good for the farmers, good for the Fair Trade movement, and good for Lutherans. Divine Chocolate’s innovative structure means that farmers get more of the profit. By increasing the demand for, and prominence of, Fair Trade chocolate in the United States, the movement continues to grow. And LWR’s involvement raises the profile of Lutherans’ longstanding commitment to justice through Fair Trade and moves us forward in working toward our vision of justice, dignity, and peace.

“For 10 years, Lutherans have been putting faith into action by purchasing and promoting Fair Trade,” said Lisa Baumgartner Bonds, vice president for external relations at Lutheran World Relief and LWR’s representative

on Divine Chocolate’s board of directors. “By stepping up and helping to make Divine Chocolate a reality, Lutherans are bringing the gospel of love and equality into the marketplace,” she said.

SWEET JUSTICE

What does the future hold for this forward-thinking chocolate company? It all depends on the consumers. While Kuapa Kokoo has been able to make great strides thanks to Fair Trade, there is much more to do. Because of the current demand, only 2 percent of the cocoa beans produced by the farmers are sold at Fair Trade prices; the rest must be sold on the volatile world commodities market.

Increased consumer demand for Fair Trade will empower small-scale farmer cooperatives like Kuapa Kokoo to sell more of their cocoa at Fair Trade prices. “We all have to go shopping. Fair Trade is just shopping with respect,” said Kwabena Ohemeng-Tinyase, managing director of Kuapa Kokoo.

So the next time the sweet tooth strikes, cure the craving with a bite of Divine Chocolate—and make life a little sweeter for someone halfway around the world. 🌿
Kattie Somerfeld is Fair Trade projects coordinator at Lutheran World Relief. For more information about the LWR Chocolate Project and Divine Chocolate, see www.lwr.org/chocolate.



CALENDAR NOTES

April

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This month first takes

us through the drama of Holy Week and then into the festive Fifty Days of Easter.

1 Sunday of the Passion, Palm Sunday

Today's texts are always shocking: We begin with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and end with his death on the cross. The crowd that shouted "Hosanna!" is the same crowd that shouted "Crucify!" This year we hear Luke's account of both events. You might read Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philip-
pians 2:5-11; and Luke 22:14-23:56 today.

The author of next year's Bible study has written that the Psalms appointed for Holy Week give us a hint of what might have been on Jesus' mind during that dramatic week. Today's Psalm is 31:9-16: "They plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O LORD."

2 Monday of Holy Week

It is an old custom to get all the housecleaning done on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week so that we are free to devote ourselves to the Triduum (the Three Days).

In between chores, you might read today's appointed texts: Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11. Today's Psalm is 36:5-11: "How precious is your steadfast love, O God!"

3 Tuesday of Holy Week

What do you do with the palms you received at church on Sunday? Many people fold them into crosses and hang

them on the wall as a reminder of Christ's victory over death, a victory won on the cross.

You might ponder today's texts in that light: Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36. Today's Psalm is 71:1-14: "You are my rock and my fortress."

4 Wednesday of Holy Week

Today's Gospel tells us about Judas' betrayal of Jesus. This text has been proclaimed on Wednesday of Holy Week for centuries; the day has long been called "Spy Wednesday" for that reason.

Today's texts are Isaiah 50:4-9a; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32. Psalm 70 is appointed for today: "Let those who seek you rejoice and be glad in you."

5 Maundy Thursday

Lent ends this afternoon before the evening service. We begin that service by confessing our sins; we enter the celebration of the great Three Days (Triduum) reconciled with God and neighbor, nourished by the body and blood of Our Lord, and washed clean, following the example of our Lord and Teacher.

If you are not able to attend worship tonight, you might unite yourself with your congregation and the whole church by reading Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and John 13:1-17, 31b-35.

6 Good Friday

Since the earliest days, Christians have gathered to hear the Passion proclaimed

and then to bow before the cross, the saving cross on which our Lord won our victory over sin and the grave. That's what makes this Friday good.

If you are not able to join your congregation in worship today, you can be united with them and the whole church in the texts appointed for Good Friday: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16–25 or Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:7–9; John 18:1–19:42.

7 Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Vigil

The great Vigil of Easter, the feast of our salvation, is the most festive and joyous celebration of the church's year. See page 13 for more.

We have a feast of Scripture and psalmody tonight—the whole history of salvation! Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Psalm 136:1–9, 23–26; Genesis 7:1–5, 11–18, 8:6–18, 9:8–13; Psalm 46; Genesis 22:1–18; Psalm 16; Exodus 14:10–31, 15:20–21; Exodus 14:1b–13, 17–18; Isaiah 55:1–11; Isaiah 12:2–6; Proverbs 8:1–8, 19–21, 9:4b–6 or Baruch 3:9–15, 32–4:4; Psalm 19; Ezekiel 36:24–28; Psalm 42 and 43; Ezekiel 37:1–14; Psalm 143; Zephaniah 3:14–20; Psalm 98; Jonah 1:1–2:1; Jonah 2:2–3, 4–6, 7–9; Isaiah 61:1–4, 9–11; Deuteronomy 32:1–4, 7, 36a, 43a; Daniel 3:1–29; Song of the Three Young Men 35–65; Romans 6:3–11; and finally the Gospel where Mary Magda-

lene meets the Risen Lord, John 20:1–18.

And what's more, tonight the whole church rejoices together in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

And tonight we sing “Glory to God” and “Alleluia” for the first time since before Lent! And we ring all the church bells in a riotous peal of joy.

Since at least the sixth century, the regular ringing of church bells has been heard for miles around every village and town in Christendom. When the bells are silent, as they are from the evening Maundy Thursday service until tonight, people notice. In France and Belgium, the story grew up that all the bells sprout wings on Thursday night and fly away to Rome for a blessing. They sleep on the roofs of the churches of Rome on Friday night and fly back just in time to ring tonight, dropping candy and Easter eggs along the way for good children to find on Sunday morning.

8 Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Day

The Easter evening service includes the story of what happened on the road to Emmaus. Some scholars suggest that the two disciples walking along the road were a couple, Cleopas and his wife. The artist Velasquez painted the wonderful “Kitchen Maid with the Supper at

Emmaus” in 1618; you can find the image on the Internet. The maid is clearly eavesdropping on the conversation between her employers and their guest—and she realizes who that guest really is.

Today's texts are (day) Acts 10:34–43 or Isaiah 65:17–25; Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24; 1 Corinthians 15:19–26 or Acts 10:34–43; Luke 24:1–12 or John 20:1–18; (evening) Isaiah 25:6–9; Psalm 114; 1 Corinthians 5:6b–8; Luke 24:13–49.

15 Second Sunday of Easter

Today's Gospel tells us the story of Thomas, who has to see the risen Christ with his own eyes and touch him with his own hands. When at last he does, he falls to his knees and makes his confession of faith with all his heart: “My Lord and my God!”

Tradition tells us that Thomas preached in Babylon and Persia, today's Iraq and Iran, before sailing to India, where he spread the gospel and was martyred by resentful pagan nobles in about the year 72. The church he planted took root and flourished: The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama was surprised to find Christians on the west coast of India when he landed there in 1502.

You might pray for all the people in that part of the world as you read today's texts, Acts 5:27–32; Revelation 1:4–8; John 20:19–31.

22 Third Sunday of Easter

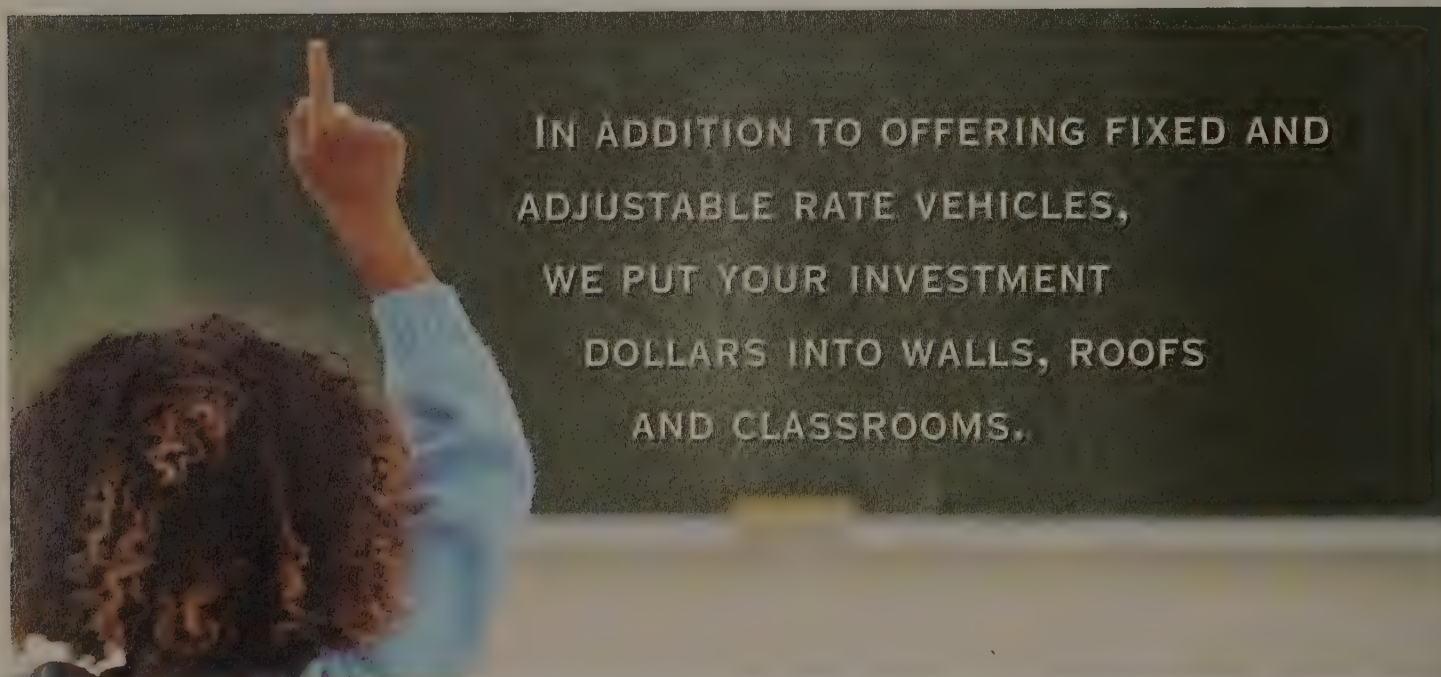
In today's first reading, we hear about the conversion of Paul. In about 1600, the artist Caravaggio painted the moment: The zealous persecutor (he hasn't yet accepted Christ) is flat on his back in the middle of the road to Damascus under a startled horse's feet. Acts 9:1-6 (7-20); Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19.

25 Mark, Evangelist

As far back as the early second century, Mark was identified as Peter's interpreter, who wrote down (but not in order) what Peter said about Jesus. Tradition also tells us that he wrote his Gospel in Rome about the time of Peter's martyrdom (between 65 and 70), for a community of mostly Gentile Christians who were suffering persecution. The church proclaims Isaiah 52:7-10; 2 Timothy 4:6-11, 18; and Mark 1:1-15 today.

29 Fourth Sunday of Easter

In the text from Acts today, we hear about the women of Joppa and their friend Dorcas, who was devoted to good works and acts of charity. You might pray in thanksgiving for all the millions of women over the centuries who have done the same good work as Dorcas as you read today's texts: Acts 9:36-43; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30.



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A decorative border of black line art featuring stylized flowers and swirling vines surrounds a central yellow banner. The banner has a decorative, scalloped top and bottom edge. Inside the banner, the title "This is the Night" is written in a large, elegant cursive script. Below it, the subtitle "THE EASTER VIGIL" is in a smaller, all-caps serif font. At the bottom of the banner, the author's name "by Bryan M. Cones" is written in a small, italicized serif font.

This is the Night

THE EASTER VIGIL

by Bryan M. Cones

Birth and death lie at the heart of what it means to be human, and we human beings surround those moments with rituals and celebrations of all kinds. We wait with expectant mothers through doctor's appointments and mark the time to birth with baby showers and nervous anticipation. We gather at the time of labor in both apprehension and excitement, sharing stories of other births, to remember and perhaps to distract, as we wait for that moment of joy.

We wait, too, with the dying, remembering times both good and bad as we keep vigil through the

physical pain of illness and the sorrow of inevitable parting. And we gather around our loved ones in their final moments, when we begin rituals of both mourning and celebration. And through the years that follow, we keep the days of both deaths and births, remembering those who shaped us and celebrating those who walk with us still.

Seen through the eyes of Christian faith, however, birth and death are more than the beginning and ending points on the line of our earthly journey. In the light of the gospel, they are moments in our journey to God. They are our personal share in Christ's paschal mys-

tery of birth, life, death, and rebirth into the reign of God. But unlike our many separate birthdays and death anniversaries, we Christians share one rebirth-day—Easter—and a single glorious celebration of our paschal journey, the Easter Vigil.

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

The Easter Vigil service begins, like birth, in darkness. As the sun sets on our Holy Saturday vigil with the entombed Christ, something unexpected happens: Instead of a funeral, the darkness of the tomb finds a challenge. A fire is lit in the darkness, and the faces of those gathered to mourn reflect its light. One great candle

marked with the cross is blessed and lit: "Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the ending. To Christ belongs all time and all the ages; to Christ belongs glory and dominion now and forever." In one moment, the power of death is undone.

"The light of Christ," sings the minister. "Thanks be to God," we sing in reply. As the Christ-light shines, it also spreads to the candles of the baptized, who share Christ's victory over death. What began as a vigil for the dead has been transformed; it has become a celebration of life, a celebration of all who have passed through the cross to new life and a hopeful waiting for those yet to be born in Christ.

In joy we sing the Exsultet (see page 16), our hymn of victory, a great thanksgiving for deliverance from death: "Rejoice, now, all heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation around God's throne!" Having walked the 40 days of Lent, recalled the betrayal and death of Christ, waited in the silence of death, we now finally hear the good news: "Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes forever!" Not content to listen, we must respond: "This is the night!"

STORIES OF SALVATION

After this burst of joy, we settle down—and wait. Both births and deaths take time, as anyone who has sat in a hospital waiting room

knows, and, like all families, we have a story to tell as we await the watery death and rebirth of those to be baptized this night. And so we start at the beginning: "Let there be light!" We hear of creation's birth, of the sun and moon and stars, of land and sea and the great sea monsters, of creeping things and cattle, and finally of human beings. "God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good."

So begins a cycle of readings and songs and prayers of praise and thanksgiving. After the story of creation's birth we hear of its death and renewal in the great flood, a sign of the waters that will soon both drown and restore those to be baptized. We recall the faith of Abraham and his chilling willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac before he learned that such sacrifice was not God's will—though God did not spare God's own Son. We rejoice with Israel on the banks of the Red Sea and sing Miriam's praise: "Sing to the LORD, who has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider have been thrown into the sea." Israel's exodus is our exodus, too, for in the sea of baptism, sin's power over us is broken.

Then our story takes a turn. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a faithful God who will feed and satisfy, who offers mercy and salvation not just to a chosen people

but to all: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters!" Holy Wisdom encourages us to abandon foolishness and follow God's ways. "Come," she says, "eat of my bread and drink the wine I have mixed," a feast we share each Sunday, and which those to be baptized will share tonight. Ezekiel looks forward to a time when God will give the chosen people a new heart and a new spirit, when the "dry bones" of the dead will live once more. We hear God's call through the prophet Zephaniah: "I will bring you home," shouts the God of Israel. We remember God's mercy to Nineveh in the time of Jonah, and finally of the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace prepared by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Our story at last comes to its climax. Now we hear the apostle Paul speak of death and birth: "We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." In joy we respond with another victory song: the "alleluia" from which we have fasted during Lent, or with a resounding "Glory to God in the highest." Standing with joy and thanksgiving, bathed in the light of Christ, we hear the resolution of our story: the Gospel account of Christ's resurrection.

NEW PEOPLE OF GOD

At last we come to the heart of our celebration. This is the night—of both death and birth, of the destruction of sin's power over us and our re-creation in Christ. As families gather for both deaths and births, so we gather our whole family. Remembering with a litany the saints of every age, we accompany those to be baptized to the font. There both the very young and the very old stand around the water: creation's chaos controlled by God's command; Noah's flood, washing away corruption to make way for the new; the Red Sea, path from slavery to sin, and from death to glorious freedom. Those to be baptized have heard God calling; they have welcomed the Holy Spirit into their hearts. They are hungry for the promised feast, ready to surrender their dry bones and stony hearts for the new flesh and spirit of those reborn in Christ.

Here, as Christians have done for thousands of years, we gather with those who will enter the mystery of death and resurrection. We pledge to support them on the way of Christ. We hear them reject sin and all that rebels against God. We receive their profession of faith in the triune God and in Christ's saving death and resurrection. We recall and affirm our own baptism, and

we bless God over the water for all the great works of salvation: "Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that those who are washed in the waters of baptism may be given new life."

Finally we rejoice as, one by one, those to be baptized enter the flood, there to die with Christ and rise again, freed from evil's power and reborn into the assembly of the saints: "You belong to Christ, in whom you have been baptized. Alleluia!" we shout. Anointed with the seal of the Holy Spirit, they are clothed in the white garment of the baptized, "the garment of salvation, the robe of righteousness" described by the prophet Isaiah. Then our newborn sisters and brothers receive their own Christ-light. Now they are "neophytes," the "new lights" of the people of God.

UNTIL THE END OF THE AGE

Our celebration would be incomplete, of course, without the family meal that seals our unity in Christ. For the first time the neophytes take their place at Holy Wisdom's table. Here with thanks and praise we share the meal that makes us one: Christ's body, the bread for our journey to the reign of God; Christ's blood, our pledge to offer ourselves as Christ did. Sustained and enlivened, we go forth to live as members

of God's family: preaching the gospel, offering praise and thanksgiving for all the world, living as servants of the poor, the forgotten, the rejected, and the stranger.

The Great Vigil is echoed throughout Easter Day in morning services, joyful eucharists, and evening prayers. After all, a celebration of eternal life needs more than a few hours! Indeed, the Vigil is only the beginning of our 50-day celebration of salvation in Christ. Over seven weeks and seven Sundays we remember the witness of the early church and renew its vision for our own time. We recall the doubts of those first believers, for their doubt lives in us still. We remember Christ's mercy even for the one who betrayed him and so learn that our betrayals will be met with mercy, too. We stand in wonder with the Twelve as the Risen One is taken from their sight; like them we hold fast to Christ's promise to be with us "until the end of the age."

When the 50th day arrives—the feast of Pentecost—we rejoice in the gift of the Holy Spirit, alive in the measure of God's presence we received in baptism, ready to be Christ's presence in the "time after Pentecost" of our everyday lives. 🌿
Bryan M. Cones, a Chicago writer and editor, holds a master's degree in theology from Catholic Theological Union at Chicago.

To see Bryan Cones's April 2006 article on the journey of Holy Week, go to www.lutheranwomantoday.org/back/06issues/0406article3.html.

EXCERPTS OF THE THE EASTER PROCLAMATION (THE EXULTET)

Rejoice, now, all heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!
Exult, all creation around God's throne! Jesus Christ is risen!
Celebrate the divine mysteries with exultation;
and for so great a victory, sound the trumpet of salvation.
Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor,
radiant in the brightness of your king!
Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes forever.
Rejoice, O holy church! Exult in glory! The risen Savior shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy,
echoing the mighty song of all God's people. . . .

. . . This is the night [*This is the night*]
in which, in ancient times,
you delivered our forebears, the children of Israel,
and led them, dry-shod, through the sea.
This is the night [*This is the night*]
in which the darkness of sin has been purged away by the rising brightness.
This is the night [*This is the night*]
in which all who believe in Christ are rescued from evil and the gloom of sin,
are renewed in grace, and are restored to holiness.
This is the night [*This is the night*]
in which, breaking the chains of death, Christ arises from hell in triumph.
O night truly blessed which alone was worthy to know
the time and hour in which Christ arose again from hell!

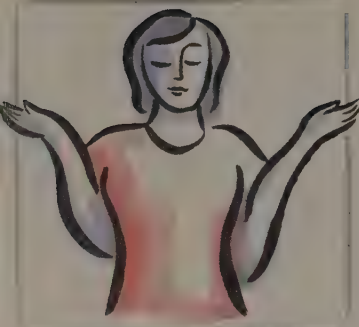
This is the night [*This is the night*]
of which it is written: "The night is as clear as the day,"
and "Then shall my night be turned into day."
The holiness of this night puts to flight the deeds of wickedness;
washes away sin; restores innocence to the fallen,
and joy to those who mourn; casts out hate; brings peace;
and humbles earthly pride.

Therefore, in this night of grace,
 receive, O God, our praise and thanksgiving
 for the light of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 reflected in the burning of this candle.
 We sing the glories of this pillar of fire,
 the brightness of which is not diminished
 even when its light is divided and borrowed.
 For it is fed by the melting wax which the bees, your servants,
 have made for the substance of this candle.
 This is the night [*This is the night*]
 in which heaven and earth are joined—things human and things divine.

We, therefore, pray to you, O God,
 that this candle, burning to the honor of your name,
 will continue to vanquish the darkness of night
 and be mingled with the lights of heaven.
 May Christ the Morning Star find it burning
 that Morning Star who never sets,
 that Morning Star who, rising from the grave,
 faithfully sheds light on the whole human race.

And we pray, O God, rule, govern, and preserve
 with your continual protection your whole church,
 giving us peace in this time of our paschal rejoicing;
 through the same Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and forever.

Amen.



LET US PRAY

To-Do List Prayers

by Debra K. Farrington

“Pray without ceasing,”

Paul tells the Thessalonians. Author Phyllis Tickle calls this the most ignored commandment in the Bible. But really now, unceasing prayer is only for monks, nuns, and hermits, right? How can those in the “real world” really pray without ceasing? Most of us are busy from sunrise to sunset just trying to cross everything off the to-do list. But that needn’t stop us from praying continually. In fact, that to-do list helps us pray without ceasing, if the Celts had it right.

The Celts, says spirituality writer Esther de Waal, were farming people who were busy from dawn to dark. Their days, so filled with chores, left little time for formal prayer. But they used their to-do list to spur their prayers. As a woman lit the fire in the morning she remembered the light of Christ and prayed that her own internal fires be lit. She spent the journey to and from the market asking God’s guidance on the path of life.

“The call to unceasing prayer is not an invitation to divided consciousness,” write the Monks of New Skete (*In the Spirit of Happiness*; Little, Brown and Company, 1999). “It does not imply that we pay any less attention to daily realities or retreat from life’s responsibilities. . . . [Unceasing prayer] means being consciously constantly conscious of the presence of God amidst the changing complexion of everyday life” (pp. 187, 189). In other words, we can be consciously constantly conscious of the Divine by noticing God’s presence in our daily and ordinary activities and encounters.

I first connected with this idea one morning in the shower when a line from Psalm 51 came to me unbidden. “Create in me a clean heart, Lord,” I thought. After that I started looking at my daily activities as opportunities to notice God’s presence. You can do the same. Make a list of the things you do each day, like putting on makeup, brushing your teeth, and so on. How might each of those activities help you notice God’s presence? When brushing your teeth in the morning, you might ask God to help you speak kindly this day. As you put on your makeup, remember that the person you see in the mirror is made in God’s image.

God is present all the time, but most of us forget to notice. By using the things we do all the time as a spur to prayer, we can begin to be consciously constantly conscious of God, and as Paul suggests, begin to pray without ceasing.

Resources

For suggestions about daily reminders of God’s presence, try my book, *Unceasing Prayer: A Beginner’s Guide* (Paraclete Press, 2002). For more about the Celtic approach to prayer, read Esther de Waal’s *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition* (Morehouse Publishing, 1999) or *God under My Roof: Celtic Songs and Blessings* (Paraclete Press, 2006). 🌿

Debra Farrington is author of eight books of Christian spirituality, a retreat leader, and speaker. To contact her about leading a retreat, visit her Web site www.debrafarrington.com.



An eye doctor can see things you can't.

One in three adults over 40 has a vision problem — and many don't even know it. That's because many vision problems have no warning signs. An eye doctor can identify serious vision and health conditions before you can. For the latest information on vision health, visit **checkyearly.com**. A public service message from the Vision Council of America and AARP.



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See Clearly®**
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HEALTH WISE

Vision Quest

by Molly M. Ginty

Patty Jacobs could not

believe her eyes. While driving on the highway, she suddenly saw the yellow median line bend and ripple in front of her. "The curve in the road would disappear, then straighten out, even though the road ahead was curving," says Jacobs, a public relations consultant in Boston. "It was the first sign I was developing age-related macular degeneration—an eye problem that runs in my family and that blurs your central vision."

Jacobs, 57, is one of 3.4 million Americans who suffer from visual impairment. During April, which is Women's Eye Health and Safety Month, health advocates are raising awareness that half of American women have some kind of problem with their eyes. They want us to protect our sight by maintaining good habits, getting regular screenings, and taking corrective-care steps that Jacobs herself is using to help keep her condition in check.

"Women account for two-thirds of the blind and two-thirds of the visually impaired," says Ilene Gipson, a professor of ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School and a senior scientist at the Schepens Eye Research Institute in Boston. "Because we live longer than men, we suffer more from age-related eye problems. Hormonal and biological differences also put us at higher risk."

While pregnant or breastfeeding, women experience hormonal changes that can cause puffiness around the eyes or necessitate stronger eyeglasses or contact lenses. Women are nine times more

likely than men to develop dry eyes, and 50 percent more likely to have autoimmune disorders such as lupus, multiple sclerosis, and rheumatoid arthritis—all of which can negatively affect the eyes.

Common vision problems among women include nearsightedness (myopia, in which faraway objects appear out of focus); farsightedness (hyperopia, in which nearby objects are blurred); and astigmatism (blurring in one direction because the cornea, which focuses images and is at the front of the eye, is not perfectly spherical).

After age 40, most women develop some degree of presbyopia, in which the eye's lens begins to harden and lose its elasticity. This makes it difficult to focus up close—and may require reading glasses or bifocals.

As they grow older, women are more likely than men to develop age-related macular degeneration (AMD, in which the central vision deteriorates); cataracts (in which clumps of protein cloud the lens); glaucoma (in which pressure builds up inside the eye and damages the optic nerves); and floaters (in which the vitreous or clear jelly in the eye forms small, dark clumps that obstruct vision).

Frustrating and debilitating though eye problems may be, a quarter of them are preventable, and half are correctable. "For this reason, we can't stress enough how important it is for women to take care of their vision throughout their lives," says Daniel Garrett, senior vice president of the Chicago-based Prevent Blindness America.

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative. Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

Maintaining good eye health can be as simple as adopting a few good habits. Outdoors, wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses that block ultraviolet radiation. While reading, use adequate light. At the computer, avoid eyestrain by following the “20:20:20 rule” recommended by the National Women’s Health Resource Center of Red Bank, New Jersey: Every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to either close your eyes or look 20 feet away.

At mealtimes, reach for foods that have eye-protective ingredients: brightly colored fruits and dark leafy greens (which contain lutein and zeaxanthin); fish (rich in omega-3 fatty acids); carrots and yams (full of vitamin A and beta-carotene). Also take a daily supplement with zinc and the vitamins A, B₂, and C.

Avoid smoking (which can boost the risk of AMD and cataracts) and get proper treatment if you have high blood pressure or diabetes (both of which can cause retinopathy or the breakdown of blood vessels in the back of the eye).

If you notice any vision problems (such as persistent pain or blurriness), immediately see an optometrist (a doctor who can evaluate eye problems) or an ophthalmologist (an M.D. who can diagnose difficulties and diseases and perform surgery).

Your doctor may prescribe medicated eye drops; glasses with bifocal, trifocal, or reading lenses; or contacts that can be hard, soft, bifocal, disposable,

extended wear, or rigid-gas permeable. You may also opt for surgery such as laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis (LASIK); photorefractive keratectomy (PRK) or conductive keratoplasty (CK)—operations that reshape the cor-



nea and end the need for corrective eyewear among 85 percent of patients.

Even if your eyes seem fine, you still need to watch out. If you wear contacts or glasses, have your eyes examined annually. If you don’t, have an eye exam at least once between ages 20 and 39; every two to four years between ages 40 and 64; and every one to two years after age 65.

“One of the scariest parts of visual impairment is that you can have eye diseases and not even know it,” says Sarah Hecker, a spokesperson for Prevent Blindness America. “With some conditions, once you lose your vision, you can never restore it. That’s why it’s crucial for women to keep an eye out—and to get the eye care they need.”

Molly M. Ginty lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Real Simple*, and *Women’s eNews*.

For more information

visit www.eyecaretoday.com

or call 800-368-7029

Women’s eNews has a free

www.preventblindness.org



OUR IMAGES OF GOD

by Audrey West

"What do you call God?" the pastor asked her. Her grandmother had died, and the family had gathered with the pastor to plan the funeral. "When you pray, what do you picture God to be like?" The questions surprised her. Although nearly 20 years old, she had never before been involved in planning a funeral. She figured they would choose hymns and tell stories about Grandma so that the pastor would know what to say during the service; she did

not expect a theological discussion about their images of God. Besides, she was unsure what to say. What if her picture of God was different from everybody else's? What if it wasn't good enough, what if it betrayed a lack of spiritual depth? Mostly, though, she was simply too sad to say anything. The only image in her mind just then was a picture of Grandma, lying in bed, hair braided and wrapped around her head like a halo.

Out of insecurity she kept quiet, but she listened as others in the family answered the question: "I call God Father," or "I just have a warm feeling when I pray," or "I think of God as a strong rock that protects me." The young woman could think only of how much she wished Grandma could be there to comfort her, and how she longed for a direct word from God so that her grief would not overwhelm her. But she heard no such word.



Soon it was time for the pastor to leave. Gathering together all of the God-images and weaving them into a prayer, Pastor asked God to protect this family in their sorrow and strengthen them for the days and weeks ahead as they learned to live in the world without their beloved grandmother. Much to the young woman's surprise, the pastor included a petition to God the Silent One. Having never before heard God addressed in that way,

she later asked about that image. The pastor explained that in a conversation, when one party is speaking, the other party is silent in order to listen. When God is silent, God is listening; it is an invitation to pray what is in our hearts.

Images of God: Where are they from?

From the opening pages of the Old Testament to the conclusion of the Book of Revelation, the Bible is filled with a variety of images

for God. The early chapters of Genesis describe God through the actions of a creator-gardener. After forming the first man out of dust and planting a garden, God walks in the garden at the time of the evening breeze. In Exodus, when Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt, God goes before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Deuteronomy 32:11 shows us God as an eagle spreading her wings and nurturing her young.

In the New Testament, Jesus calls God “Abba, Father,” even as he tells parables that depict that same father through the activity of a woman baking bread or sweeping the floor for a lost coin.

Imagine a conversation among the biblical writers, as if they were answering the question, “Who is God for you?” “God is my shepherd,” the psalmist says, inviting others to respond. Hosea chimes in, “God is like a mother bear” (Hosea 13:8). The writer of 1 John advocates for “God is light” (1 John 1:5), while the author of Hebrews calls God “the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). Nearly every writer in the canon adds something to the discussion.

Noteworthy, perhaps, about this imaginary conversation is that none of the biblical writers suggests that any single image for God is the only appropriate one. Indeed, we find in some writings such a host of images that it can be difficult to reconcile them. The book of Isaiah, for instance, suggests several striking metaphors for God, such as mighty warrior and woman in labor (Isaiah 42:13–14), king (43:15), and mother who comforts her child (66:13).

Images of God: Culture and experience

The mosaic of biblical images for God testifies to the experience of God’s people, across generations

and across cultures, as they have reflected on God’s activity in their lives and in the lives of their communities. When the people of God tell the story of a flight from Egypt and God’s presence during 40 years in the wilderness, they bear witness to a God who leads them, feeds them, and guides them safely home. Psalm 23 recounts similar acts of God, but states them using the image of a shepherd, who “leads me beside still water . . . prepares a table before me . . . [brings me] to dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.” The psalmist’s words reflect not only the experience of the people but also the culture to which they belong, where shepherds offer a tangible metaphor for speaking about this God whom they cannot see. Jesus himself picks up this pastoral image, common to his Galilean background, when he calls himself the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11).

Centuries later, when the Italian artist Michelangelo painted his famous frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he depicted God as a white-bearded, grandfatherly figure, a strong and muscular man, reaching out to give life to a young man who we know to be Adam. Adam looks very much like God, only younger: physically fit and posed in a way that reflects the pose of God. If people are created in the

image of God, so too is the image of God in this painting mirrored by the image of Adam, right down to his Italian features.

A very different picture of the same biblical story is offered in the poem, “The Creation,” by the African American scholar and poet, James Weldon Johnson (*God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, Penguin Classics, 1990). Johnson portrays God “like a mammy bending over her baby,” shaping a lump of clay into God’s own image.

In both works—the painting and the poem—God is represented in words or pictures that are drawn from the cultural background of the artist. The same is true for the biblical writers and for us, as well. We tend to speak about God in images that reflect our backgrounds, our experiences, and the cultures of which we are a part.

Images of God: Our prayers

I learned in a workshop on prayer that life experience and the images we use for God may be intimately linked. After we learned about various forms of prayer and spiritual practices, our workshop assignment was to write a series of three short prayers, addressing God in a different image for each prayer: God as father, God as rock, God as mother. During the next week, we were to read our three prayers daily and meditate on how the ways we

addressed God shaped our experience during the prayers.

At the end of the week, several workshop participants reported that it was easy to compose and pray the first two prayers, using the images of father and rock for God, because these images were familiar from church. Everyone in the group knew that Jesus had taught his disciples to pray saying "Our Father," and all had heard in the psalmody the protective strength of God as a rock and shield. The third prayer, however, in which God was addressed in the image of a mother, was much more difficult for some of the participants. They felt a great deal of dissonance in seeing one God as both father and mother, even though they knew well the statement from Genesis 1:27 that male and female are both created in God's image.

Other participants reported a different experience. It was for them exceedingly painful to pray while addressing God as a father, because the paternal image reminded them of violence and abuse they had experienced at the hands of their own fathers. When they wrote prayers to God using maternal images, however, they were mindful of "the God who gave you birth" (Deuteronomy 32:18), the One who promises, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). They

reported feeling protected and nurtured by God, safe to express their innermost concerns in prayer.

At the end of the workshop, nearly all the participants affirmed the value of practicing new or unfamiliar images for God in order to remain attentive to the ways we shape and are shaped by our prayers. Following the example of the biblical writers, we may enrich our prayer life by drawing on multiple images as we speak and listen to God.

Multiple images, the same God

When the pastor at a funeral prays to the Silent One, she calls upon the very same God whose voice speaks the whole of creation into being. Our prayer to a Mighty King who does battle against the forces of evil is a prayer to the same One who gave up his life on a cross for us and for our enemies. God of strength, God of comfort, higher than the heavens, a warm embrace: in a particular moment, or day, or week, any one of those images may express most clearly our relationship with the God in whom we have life, our confession of the One who sustains and redeems us.

For many people, these images change over time, just as they did for the biblical writers. Our life experiences may give rise to new images, new ways of expressing most fully

our relationship with God. A deepening relationship encourages us to return to the Scriptures and seek there the images that have shaped the people of God before us. This diversity of images reminds us that human language is inadequate to express fully the whole of the reality of God. God is greater than any images we might speak or hold in mind. God is God, beyond the limits of our language. Yet God has given the gift of language as a way for people to reflect the truth about themselves and their relationship to God. Our mental images of God may change, but the reality of God does not change.

Whenever I think of our many and varied images for God, I am reminded of a four-year-old girl named Anna who lived near me many years ago. One afternoon as we were reading a book together, Anna pointed to the pink-tinged sky of a sunset, framed by the mountains below. "Look!" she cried out, laughing with joy. "God is wearing a pink dress!" She was too young to know it, of course, but Anna's delight in the God who paints the sky was a confession that four-year-old girls, just as much as the grandmothers who come before them, are created in the very image of God. 🌸

Audrey West is associate professor of New Testament at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

IS THAT YOU, GOD?

by Sue Gamelin

One day years ago, Jay, our third child, told me that he sometimes heard his name being called out when no one was around. I stood there wondering if this was teenage dreaming, the first signs of schizophrenia, or just another in a long series of efforts to throw his mom off balance. But Jay didn't look as if he were needling me. Instead, he seemed to be telling me a precious truth,

the kind we are reluctant to share lest someone make fun of it. He said that when he heard his name called out and no one was around, he would answer, "Speak, God. I'm listening."

Little Samuel answered much the same way when a voice calling his name interrupted his sleep. "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening," Samuel said in 1 Samuel 3:10. He said those poignant words

at a time in Israel's history when the "word of the LORD was rare . . . [and] visions not widespread" (3:1). But in the temple where this child slept, the "Lamp of God had not yet gone out" (3:3). Neither had the voice of God. "Samuel! Samuel!" God called into this young boy's dreams time and time and time again (3:4, 3:6, 3:8).

Finally, with the help of the priest Eli, Samuel brightened the





temple's gloom with his answer, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

Have you heard your name called out in the night at the edges of your sleep? Has a voice interrupted your prayers with an unanticipated response? Has the hair on your arms stood up in the midst of an ordinary worship service when you experienced God's presence in a way that others seemed oblivious to?

"Speak, LORD," Samuel called out into the darkness of the temple at Shiloh, "for your servant is listening." "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," proclaimed Mary to the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:38).

If you have answered "yes" to any of these questions, you know that you have been blessed with God's presence in your life. If you have been able to whisper your own

question, "Is that you, God?" you know the blessing that followed.

But how can you be sure it is God's voice calling your name, God answering your prayers, God showing up to speak to you even when there is a crowd around? "Is that you, God," you may ask, "or is it my own yearning for something, anything to happen?" Your question may be terribly urgent: "Is that you, God, or are the forces of evil

teasing me in the way I am most easily deceived?”

Of course, only you and God can answer these important questions. But it is vital to answer them. If we don't wrestle with these questions, we might miss or dismiss God's persistent attempts to reach us. If we don't think God will speak to us, we may fill our prayer time with the sound of our own voices, giving God no space to interrupt our petitions with answers. If we ignore the whisper or shout of God calling out our names because we are sure we have it all figured out, we may miss an amazing divine intervention. Efforts to hush that voice may lead us to push God even further away, to turn up the volume on the TV or turn on the computer or pick up the phone.

HEARING GOD'S VOICE

Just in case any of those possibilities exist for you, I offer some hints from my own experience and the experiences that others have shared with me. I offer them in the hope that, when we hear our names called out, we may answer tremblingly, “Speak, God, I am listening,” and not with our impatient telephone voices, “Thank you, but I'm not interested.”

I have learned that God may not use words to make our hearts burn within us. At 1 p.m. on May 8, 1977, I understood—quite suddenly

and without preamble—that I was supposed to leave a life that I loved and go to seminary to become a pastor. I remember exactly where I stood right then, with an amazing sense of God's gift of peace flowing in, with, and under me. It seemed that God was saying, without words, “So you finally got it, Sue!” Many others have known this “voice,” too: Luther, Wesley, Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, my husband's Aunt Louise, and Raymond, a recovering addict in my town. Have you heard God that way? “Is that you, God? Speak, for I'm listening.”

I've learned that God may be pretty blunt in answering our prayers. Indeed, God asked Samuel to announce punishment for evildoers, news that would make “the ears of anyone who hears of it tingle” (3:11). I've heard God's blunt voice, too. It happened one day when I seemed to think I *was* God. I was stomping along a path in a park and telling God exactly what should be done in a certain situation, adding that all the other fools working on the problem were dead wrong. As clearly as I could hear the red cardinals calling to one another, I heard a voice say, “Leave it alone.”

“Wait a second,” was my immediate response. “Is that you, God? If it is, I want you to say, ‘Good girl, Susan. You're right, as always.’” But then the voice spoke those plain

words again: “Leave it alone.” In that moment I knew that it was God's answer. And so I did “leave it alone,” and that was the right thing to do. “Is that you, God? You're not saying what I want you to say. But speak to me and I'll listen, however reluctantly.”

OTHER PEOPLE AND DREAMS

It may be other people who speak blunt words of admonition or eloquent words of support on behalf of God. Sue Setzer and Walter Bouman, in their marvelous book, *What Shall I Say? Discerning God's Call to Ministry* (Augsburg Fortress, 1995), advise us to turn to others when we wonder if we are called to the ministry of the gospel. They suggest that we ask them, “Do you see in me gifts that God could use? Do you think God is calling me to ministry?” Other questions may well be ours. “Should I move?” “Am I supposed to intervene in a situation?” “Could I volunteer to do that?” “Would leaving be the best thing?”

The tricky part of this process is that we have to listen to and ponder prayerfully the answers of the wise and trustworthy people whom we ask. Their advice may be unwelcome. What we hear may be God's “no” to our own plans. Or it may be advice that is stunningly affirming. Martin Luther spoke of the mutual conversation

and consolation of the brothers and sisters. God may be speaking through them. "Is that you, God? Are you talking to me through Joseph and Ron, Marion and Jeanette? Speak, then, for I'm trying to listen."

I believe there is another way that God may answer our prayers. For more than a decade I dreamed that I was in charge of a baby—and I kept losing track of her or forgetting about her. I hated this nightmare. Each time I had it, my sleep was troubled by feelings of panic, hysteria, guilt, and shame. I knew why I dreamed it. After many years, one of our daughters was able to tell us that she had been molested when she was very young. My shock and tremendous sadness for her were quickly matched by feelings of anger and guilt. I hadn't been able to do the most basic thing any mother is called to do, keep a child safe.

In the dream the baby is supposed to be in my care, but I mess up, night after night. But one night, I dreamed that the child I was taking care of was Jesus. This dream was a happy one, because this time I was taking good care of the little one. Others in my dream affirmed that for me. "Was that you, God, speaking to my feelings of failure and dismay, giving me another chance?" I think so, for with that dream, the bad dreams stopped.

I believe that God uses our dreams to speak to us, just as he used the dreams of Joseph, Pilate's wife, and Paul to speak to them. Sleep may disarm our defenses. Our slumbering minds may be able to let go of our waking reluctance and allow us to say, "Speak, LORD. Your servant is listening."

HOW DO WE KNOW?

But how do we figure out that the voice we hear, the dream we dream, the burning within us is truly God's voice, God's dream, God's presence? A colleague once told a group of us about his experience when he worked in a group home for people dealing with mental illness. Residents would often tell him that they were either Jesus or God. My colleague learned to reply, "Then, what have you to tell me?" The tirade or disturbing visions or profanity that would follow would let him know that the resident was no more Jesus than is the foul-mouthed person who sits behind us at a movie or the rude one who cuts into line at the grocery store.

One day, a woman announced her divinity to my colleague, and he answered with his question about her message. She then proclaimed to him life-giving words about God's grace and wisdom. "Is that you, God?" It just might be!

How *do* we know? We have

a yardstick by which to measure whether God is involved. This measuring stick is the good news of Jesus Christ, news called out to us from an empty blood-stained cross and a sunlit tomb strewn with grave cloths. The words on the measuring stick are the words with which Jesus answered the scribe who asked which commandment was first. Love God, love your neighbor, love yourselves, Jesus said, and do this with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. (See Mark 12:28–31.) If the voice we hear, the understandings that flow into our burning hearts, the words spoken to us by our sisters and brothers in Christ, the dreams that haunt us don't reverberate with these three things together—loving God, loving our neighbors, and loving ourselves—then maybe we're hearing from something (or someone) other than God.

Listen, my sisters, when you pray. Talk with others when you are uncertain about what you've heard. Ponder your dreams. Open your life to wonder when your heart tingles. And don't be afraid to say, "Speak, God, your servant is listening." You may miss the gift of a lifetime if you keep silent. 🌿

The Rev. Sue Gamelin and her husband, Tim, are the pastors of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in High Point, N.C. She wrote *Lutheran Woman Today's* 2005–2006 Bible study, *Act Boldly in the Fruit of the Spirit*.



BIBLE STUDY

HOPE IN GOD IN TIMES OF SUFFERING SESSION 8

The God to Whom We Pray

by Terry and Faith Fretheim

TEXTS USED IN THIS SESSION

Proverbs 15:8

Deuteronomy 4:7

Isaiah 65:1-2

Isaiah 1:15

Jeremiah 26:19

Romans 8:26

Luke 15:7

Psalms 22:5

Isaiah 65:1-2

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Isaiah 1:15

Isaiah 58:4-9

Jeremiah 26:19

Numbers 14:19-20

Exodus 32:7-14

Joel 2:17-18

Exodus 32:7-14

Numbers 14:13-20

Exodus 32:11-13

Overview

Suffering and prayer seem to go together. Whenever there is pain and suffering, prayers are offered. But how we think about the relationship between prayers and suffering depends a great deal on the *kind of God* to whom we pray. In this session, we think together about suffering and the God to whom we pray in such a time.

Theme verse

Proverbs 15:8

"The prayer of the upright is God's delight."

Opening

Hymn "Lead Me, Guide Me" *Evangelical Lutheran*
Worship 768

Prayer

Who's here today

To repeat, sharing can often be difficult, especially if you are a private person; however, discussion opens up doors and helps us grow in understanding. So, as you come together today, be prepared to tell your name and what image of God you see when you pray.

We begin by reading some Bible passages that give us a beginning in our thinking together about prayer. Read the following verses:

Proverbs 15:8

Deuteronomy 4:7

Isaiah 65:1-2

Isaiah 1:15

Jeremiah 26:19

Romans 8:26

Prayer in American culture

In American culture, prayer is commonly shaped by efficiency, time constraints, success, and especially individualism—prayers that center on *me* or those close to *me*. When it comes to prayer, a consumer

mentality is in the air: Short-term perspectives prevail and immediate results are expected. The function of prayer seems often to be like Weight Watchers—we want discernible results, something that is measurable, oh, and quickly, please!

> *What do you think about this perspective on prayer?*

> *Do you think it is an accurate picture of the way in which many people think about prayer?*

In response to the individualism that is so prevalent in our culture and which shapes our understanding of prayer, one of the most basic ways we can describe prayer is: Prayer is a form of mission. Prayer is a means in and through which God gets things done in the world, even beyond the range of our voices. God acts in the world in and through your prayers. Does that mean that God gets less done if you don't pray?

Have you thought in this way before: "God gets less done if I don't pray; God not only wants my prayers, God needs my prayers."

> *Do you think this statement is plausible? If so, how does it make you feel about your prayers? If you do not think it is reasonable, why?*

Prayer is a form of mission, a means by which God gets things done in the church and the world, even beyond our knowing. But why do we so often not believe that?

God and prayer: answers or responses?

In thinking about our prayers, we often look for specific *answers*, say, a cure from a disease. It is certainly appropriate to pray for specific things. But if a particular answer does not come, we often blame God or wonder if we have enough faith or if we even know how to pray.

How can we avoid this kind of thinking about prayer? One helpful way might be to speak of God's *responses* to our prayers rather than answers. We can release our prayers to God and let God respond in ways that God finds appropriate.

God encourages prayer; God receives prayer; God evaluates prayer; God transforms prayer; and God responds to prayer. We are called to release our prayers to God. Don't hang on to your prayers yourself, but release them and let God work with them. And be prepared for responses that may not look like answers!

Think about the difference between an answer (precisely related to the prayer) and a response (reply).

> *Generally, when you pray are you looking for an answer, or are you looking for a response that may not be what you precisely expected or wanted?*

> *What do you think might happen if, when you pray for something in particular, you also pray for the discernment to be able to see the response?*

Prayer and images of God

The issue of prayer is so often not about prayer at all; the issue of prayer is the image we have of the God to whom we pray. Your images of God will shape your life, including your prayer life.

Here we are, back with images of God again! As you read the following images, add your thoughts. What do you see as the problem with an "above and beyond God," "a buddy-buddy God," "a superhero God," and so on?

On the other hand, you may see some positives to these images. If so, what might those be?

Recall some of the images of God we have noted in earlier sessions and apply them to the way in which

you think about prayer. God may be an absentee landlord: Nothing much gets done and your calls are seldom returned. Or, God may be an absolute monarch: in total control of things, micromanaging the world. The biblical material wants to steer us between those two ditches because prayer would make little, if any, sense in either of those cases.

Or, God is so above and beyond the world that every prayer is a long-distance call with a connection that fades in and out. Or, God is buddy-buddy, where everything can be shared, but God is never “in your face.” Prayers are voiced only with respect to what can serve my needs, often only pleasant ones.

Or, God is a superhero who hears prayers and, faster than a speeding bullet, is able to accomplish anything. With such a God, there are no limitations of any kind, and the only issue is the sincerity of those who pray. Or, God is basically weak: God may be present everywhere, but never does anything.

One could go on—God is an indulgent parent, easily manipulated. Or God is a mail-order catalog, where you pick out what you want. Or God is an electric power station, where you push the right buttons and there is power, if not for today at least for tomorrow.

A much better image for God is this: God is a weaver or a seamstress, who evaluates the threads of our prayers and weaves the right colors into God’s tapestry of work in the world. God stitches the patches of our prayers and service into the quilt of God’s new heaven and earth.

> Do you have an image of God you would like to share? This is a very personal question. Please know that you do not have to tell the group about it. However, the positive side of sharing is you just may trigger an idea in someone else’s mind that may be helpful to them in their faith journey.

Prayer and relationship

In the Bible, the most basic image offered for God and prayer is *relatedness*. Prayer may be considered a gift of relationship God has established with us. Prayer is a means by which God and human beings can meaningfully interact with one another.

How we think about relationship is important. Recall what was said about relationships in earlier sessions. What does it take for a relationship to be genuine?

One important characteristic of a genuine relationship and prayer is this: God enters into relationships because God is not the only one with something important to say. God knows that communication, talking back and forth, is key to healthy relationships. And prayer is God’s gift to us for the sake of such communication.

Speaking and hearing, listening and responding, are central to what it means to be in a relationship of integrity. Consider what happens to any relationship if there is little or no communication. What might happen to your relationship with God if you don’t communicate?

The Bible does not speculate on how communication between God and human beings take place, but it does testify to the reality of it. Humans have a wide-range of ways to communicate with God: petition, intercession, lament, confession, thanksgiving, praise—every form of speech imaginable.

But how does God communicate with us? God speaks to us through words spoken by other people, or words in the night (perhaps through dreams), or words more directly into our minds, words that are suddenly right there. Or, you may not hear a word or think a thought, but you have a feeling, perhaps agitation, a sense of something wrong or out of place. Or perhaps you have a feeling of peace or calm flowing through you and over you.

God takes some risk in entering into a commu-

communicating relationship with us. By giving us speaking privileges, God chooses to be vulnerable. We can now speak words to God that hurt—words that reject or resist the word of God, words that presume upon the relationship, words that disrupt the harmony of the relationship. Yet, that is a risk that God is willing to take for the sake of closeness. Recall Proverbs 15:8, “The prayer of the upright is God’s delight.” God is delighted when people pray, most basically because prayer is a sign of health in the relationship.

Sometimes when we think of God’s relationship to our prayers we think of a God who remains at a distance from us. But God doesn’t know you because God has read about you on some celestial Web site. God doesn’t hear your prayers because God listens to some heavenly radio. God knows you because God is caught up in your very life; God experiences you in your every moment. God experiences your sin; God experiences your pain and suffering; God experiences the wonder that is you. God wants only what is best for you.

► *Do you believe God has “spoken” to you? How? What was your response?*

► *In your opinion, how do you think people feel about someone who claims that God has spoken to him or her? Why do you think they feel that way?*

The efficacy of prayer

How might we speak about the effectiveness of our prayers?

Some people have too much confidence regarding the efficacy of prayer. They think: “I pray for a parking place, and lo! one appears around the next corner. All it takes is strong faith.” Do you suppose that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was praying for a nice place to stay in Bethlehem? Do you suppose that the apostle Paul did not have enough faith, and that was why his prayer to remove the thorn in his flesh failed?

But other people seem to have a remarkably limited sense of the efficacy of prayer. The Bible speaks of four levels of efficacy in prayer. All too often, only the first item is considered seriously.

1. **Prayer has an effect on the one who prays.** It makes the pray-er feel good. Or, it motivates us to redirect our thoughts and lives toward those persons or things for which we pray.
2. **Prayer has an effect on the relationship between the pray-er and God.** In and through prayer, our relationship with God is made more mature. Yet, all too often if this level of efficacy is acknowledged, this change is thought to occur only on the human side of the relationship. For, we often think that God in relationship is never affected.
3. **Prayer has an effect upon God.** Prayers contribute something to the way in which God relates to us or to the world, in various ways. Prayers of repentance make for rejoicing in heaven (see Luke 15:7). Or, consider Psalm 22:5: God is “enthroned on the praises of Israel.” That is to say, God’s rule is furthered among us, or God’s reputation is enhanced within our world by our prayers of praise.
Even more, God is genuinely moved by our prayers, perhaps even persuaded by our prayers (see session 5 on laments). The Bible claims that prayer has an effect on what God gets done in the world. Your prayers make a difference to God.
4. **Prayer has an effect on the people and situations for which we pray.** This is true whether that third party is aware of being prayed for or not. Somehow the power of God is made more available for that situation because you pray. In this sense, prayer is a form of mission in and through which God gets things done in the world beyond our words or deeds.

- > *If you have the time, which of these four effects of prayer would you like to know more about, read about, or discuss in greater detail?*
- > *Which of the four effects of prayer, if any, do you find troubling?*

Looking further at biblical texts

Look again at Isaiah 65:1–2. When we don't pray, it affects God. People do have the power to make God less welcome in their lives, to give God less room in which to work. On the other hand, prayer can provide more space for God to work in our lives and in the lives of others.

God certainly has the capacity to break through into human lives in ways that human beings cannot. One thinks of God's perseverance with the boy Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:1–10; God keeps calling and finally breaks through. God is a highly persevering God. God is ever unsurpassed in creating and finding openings in our lives, even when all the doors seem to be closed.

Or, look at Isaiah 1:15 (see also Isaiah 58:4–9). Our lack of care for the poor and needy may narrow God's ways of working in our lives. When we look beyond ourselves to the cares of others, communication between God and us is opened up. If we are too focused on ourselves and do not reach out to others, our personal relationship with God is affected in a negative way. Prayer is not a substitute for action, but prayer and action can work together.

Prayers of intercession

We have noted above a text that has to do with intercessory prayer (Jeremiah 26:19); for other such prayers, see Numbers 14:19–20; Exodus 32:7–14; Joel 2:17–18. Note the impact the prayers have on the lives of individuals and on the shape of their community. Prayer for others is effective—even if they don't know that you are praying for them! Your prayers make a difference, not

just for people but also for God. God may now do one thing rather than another that God had planned to do.

Look more closely at Exodus 32:7–14 (for a parallel text, see Numbers 14:13–20). The people have sinned and God speaks to Moses, announcing their judgment. Moses implores God on their behalf, but he does not suggest that God's announcement of judgment is inappropriate. Nor does he make Israel's good deeds a part of his appeal. Moses' reasons are God's reasonableness, God's reputation among the nations of the world, and God's promises (Exodus 32:11–13).

Because of Moses' response, God now has some new ingredients with which to work. There seem to be three new ingredients: (1) Moses' decision to intercede on behalf of the sinful people. (2) Moses' insight into the nature of the situation. These matters are not new to God, but if Moses thinks this way, that's important for God. (3) Moses' energy! The new energy that Moses brings changes the dynamics of the situation with which God has to work. Think of what it means for God to honor what you bring to the table—what you have to say makes a difference.

- > *Have you experienced a situation when a decision was made, and then you (or someone else) had a helpful insight into the situation and exerted some energy in the matter? Did this ever result in change in the original decision? If so, this would be helpful to share in the group. Granted, this is often not as visible as in the story of Moses.*

Some words of caution. We must not forget that this is a genuine relationship. That means that it is not mechanical, as if our prayers trigger in God some programmed response. One must insist on the living, dynamic character of the relationship. You know that responses within any relationship are never predictable even between those who know each other very well.

Another factor to take into account is the pervasiveness of sin and evil in our lives. Sin and evil can get in the way of God's responses to our prayers. For example, we pray for healing, and healing is not forthcoming. So, we may end up blaming God for not answering our prayers. In fact, however, it may have been the medicine we were taking (or not taking); it may have been a mistake on the part of a medical practitioner; it may be that a lack of funding for medical research meant that a breakthrough in treating a particular disease was not possible. Any number of other human failings could be cited.

Sometimes when we pray about a situation of suffering, we may think that all that is at work is our prayer and God. But there are a multitude of other factors present in any given moment. Some of those factors may be so resistant to God's will that God's will does not get done. And God's heart is the first heart to break, and God's tears are the first to flow.

To conclude, prayer is a God-given way for people to give God more room to work. Prayers do shape the future in ways different from what would have been the case had no prayers been uttered.

Our God has established a genuine relationship with us and honors that relationship. As such, our God is revealed not as one who is unbending or unyielding, or one who assumes a "take it or leave it" attitude. The people of God are not in the hands of an iron fate or a predetermined order. God is open to taking new directions in view of new times and places. God's steadfast love for you, God's saving will for all,

and God's faithfulness to promises made, however, are never-changing. God will keep promises!

You are a member of the people of God and you have been given the power of prayer. Prayer is one way in which the mission of God can be furthered in the life of the world—even beyond the range of our voices.

Closing today's session

We hope you have found as much joy in reading and discussing this session as we found in writing it. We pray you will continue to reflect on, rejoice in, and share boldly the realization that God loves us each of us enough to want to stay in touch with us all the time. What a remarkable and generous gift!

Hymn "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying"

Worship Boldly, p. 119

Prayer

Looking ahead to Session 9

In the final session of this study we will discuss the concept of suffering as vocation—God's, Jesus', and ours. Sound like a real downer? Well, it's not! When we enter into the lives of people who are suffering, as Mother Teresa did, we too will suffer. True, we do not have to do this, but God needs us to get God's work done on earth.

Terry Fretheim is the Elva B. Lovell Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. **Faith** is a retired staff member of Women of the ELCA.

Coming up in

LutheranWoman
TODAY

JUNE AND JULY/AUGUST > Bible Study "Act Boldly for Mission" by Kelly Fryer.

SEPTEMBER > *LWT* begins the nine-month study, "Blessed to Follow: The Beatitudes as a Compass for Discipleship" by Martha E. Stortz. To subscribe, go to www.lutheranwomantoday.org (one year is only \$12—a great value).

The Victims among Us

by Nikki Massie

It's a day just like any other day. You take the kids to school, arrive at work, and decide to have lunch with some friends. In the restaurant you see a pretty young Latina girl hanging around the kitchen door. Initially you think, "Why isn't she in school?" When the girl sees you looking at her, she ducks into the kitchen. You finish your lunch and get ready to leave, but something about that girl keeps nagging at you. "Oh, well," you think, shrugging off the feeling, "it really isn't any of my business."

The truth is that you may have come into contact with a child victim of trafficking. An estimated 14,000 to 17,000 people are trafficked into the United States each

year, and 30 to 50 percent of them are children, according to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Yet only a small number are ever identified and receive the help they need, according to DOJ figures.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) works with social service organizations, the federal government, and churches to spread awareness about the crime of child trafficking. There may be trafficked children in your community, but unless you know what to look for, they are practically invisible.

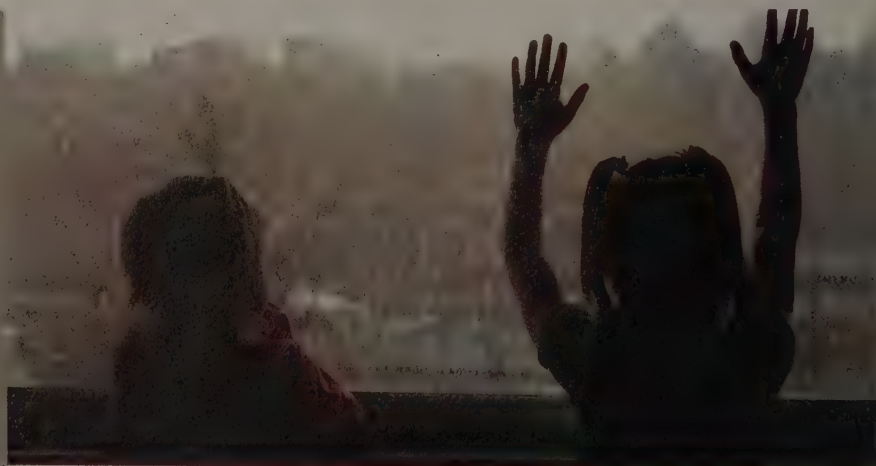
CHILD TRAFFICKING

By definition, a victim of child trafficking has either been subjected

to commercial sexual exploitation or has been subjected to labor or debt bondage through use of force, fraud, or coercion. Street children, unwanted children, and abused children are especially vulnerable to traffickers. These children come to the United States believing they'll find opportunities. Instead they find themselves enslaved by traffickers who use their illegal status to hold them hostage, threatening to turn them over to the authorities if they do not cooperate.

Trained staff in our schools or hospitals might be able to identify these children. What often stops us from recognizing victims is our reluctance to intervene in what

LIRS ADVOCATES ON BEHALF OF THE
UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN WHO CANNOT SPEAK
FOR THEMSELVES. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WORK
OF LIRS, VISIT THE WEB SITE AT WWW.LIRS.ORG.



seems to be “a family matter” or a situation where we feel that “it’s none of our business.”

In one common trafficking situation, scantily clad young girls sit in a bar where they flirt with older men and entice them to buy drinks. Diane Baird, a case manager at an LIRS-affiliated agency, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, has worked with these “bar girls.” She says one of the big challenges of working with trafficking victims is that “they sometimes feel as if they’ve betrayed the trafficker . . . they’ve been conditioned to trust the trafficker and don’t understand why they are being taken away.”

Although bar girls aren’t always required to have sex, this method of trafficking is a form of commercial sex exploitation (CSE). The ELCA condemns CSE as “sinful because it is destructive of God’s good gift [of sexuality] and human integrity.” It is appalling that such exploitation could happen to children, but 65 percent of the child trafficking victims served by LIRS have been sexually exploited,

according to Susan Krehbiel, LIRS’s director for children’s services.

People who do migrant work, usually farming, are often called “illegals” and treated with contempt. In many cases, these “illegals” are actually victims of forced labor trafficking. Alejandro, a 17-year-old Guatemalan orphan, came to America to start a new life. Instead he was held hostage and forced to turn his pay over to his traffickers.

Eventually Alejandro managed to escape and met a real Good Samaritan who had learned about trafficking at a training session. Alejandro was placed in foster care and is now safe. Children who are victims of forced labor trafficking make up 9 percent of LIRS’s trafficking referrals.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

So how can you help trafficked children? Most importantly, recognize that human trafficking is a global epidemic. Perhaps you’ve seen a “promiscuous” bar girl or an “illegal” worker. Our concern

for the victims of human trafficking demands that we change our view of people who come to the United States. Second, if you see a situation that looks suspicious, be empowered to investigate. “If a child can talk to you, ask them questions about their situation,” said Amy Anderson, an LIRS foster care specialist.

Often trafficked children are under the control of the trafficker. “Church may be the one place where children are allowed to go and can talk to someone,” said Molly Daggett of another LIRS-affiliated agency, Lutheran Community Services Northwest.

Lastly, talk to your neighborhood crime watch or your congregation about trafficking.

Remember, bringing light to the issue of child trafficking and spreading awareness about this global problem is the most important step you can take in protecting vulnerable children. 🌿

Nikki Massie is a program assistant for children’s services at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS).

HOW TO USE THESE ARTICLES

- Advertise the national 24-hour hotline for victims of sexual exploitation. The toll-free number (888-373-7888) provides local contacts for help.
- Download, print, and read *A Day Full of Light* (go to www.womenoftheelca.org and find it under What We Do/Engage in Action).
- Discuss the resource with others.
- Read the ELCA statement on Commercial Sexual Exploitation (www.elca.org/socialstatements/sexualexploitation).
- Find out what other Lutheran groups are doing, specifically

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (www.lirs.org/what/children/tcibackground.htm).

- Learn your state’s laws on trafficking through the Center for Women Policy Studies (www.centerwomenpolicy.org). Explore the site’s section on U.S. Policy Advocacy to Combat Trafficking (PACT).
- If you’re interested in working to combat commercial sexual exploitation, find out which social service agency, church, or governmental office in your community is already working with this issue and partner with them, rather than striking out on your own.

Love Your Neighbor

BATTLING CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

by Terri Lackey

What could a former prostitute living in Minnesota and an Italian-born Roman Catholic nun possibly have in common? Call it sexual obsession. Or more precisely, a passion to rid the world of sex crimes against humanity.

Forced into sexual service at 13, raped at 15, and pistol-whipped as a young adult, Joy Friedman now works for Breaking Free, an organization in St. Paul, Minnesota, that helps women escape the chains of commercial sexual exploitation. "I've been out of it all for six years. That's not who I was; it was done to me." Now in her mid-40s and free of drugs, alcohol, and prostitu-

tion, Friedman said she deserves to have "a family, a happy marriage, a good life."

And Sister Eugenia Bonetti of Rome works diligently to see that Friedman and others like her all over the world get that chance. Bonetti of the Italian Union of Major Superiors, a body of all women's religious orders in Italy, oversees 100 shelters in Italy that are safe havens for women and children forced into commercial sex labor. She calls human trafficking the newest form of slavery.

Both women participated in a panel about the effects of commercial sexual exploitation on society

during a conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, November 3–5, 2006. Sponsored by Lutheran World Federation North American Region, Women of the ELCA, Evangelical Lutheran Women Inc. (in Canada), and the ELCA's Justice for Women program in Church in Society, speakers tackled tough issues surrounding human trafficking, the dangers of the Internet for children, and the demographics of sex workers and consumers.

COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Commercial sexual exploitation includes the businesses of prostitution, pornography, and stripping



SISTERS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EXPLOITATION, SISTER EUGENIA BONETTI (LEFT) AND JOY FRIEDMAN JOINED FORCES IN WINNIPEG TO SHED LIGHT ON THE \$9.5 BILLION INDUSTRY. "SOME 90% OF VICTIMS ARE WOMEN AND CHILDREN," ACCORDING TO CORNELIUS BULLER.

According to a statement adopted by the Church Council of the ELCA in 2001. It is an organized form of sinful behavior, and is especially demonic when it exploits children and youth, the statement continues.

It includes viewing pornographic videos, downloading pornography from the Internet, purchasing sex from adults or children, visiting strip clubs, engaging in simulated sex by phone or computer, using escort services, and participating in sex tourism.

"Poverty makes people vulnerable," said Cornelius Buller, executive director of Urban Mission Initiatives at Camp Arnes in Winnipeg, who believes that is one of the main reasons people are forced into the sex trade. Invited as a speaker because of his work on issues of human trafficking, Buller said 600,000 to 2 million people (up to 4 million) are sold into bound labor (sexual or otherwise) every year, "and 90 percent of them are women and children."

Various studies indicate the average age of entry into the sex trade, either by force or choice, is between 13 and 15, Buller said, adding that many of those are children who run away from abusive home situations.

He said that at \$9.5 billion revenue annually, trafficking in human beings is the third most lucrative organized criminal industry in the

world, behind the sale of weapons and drugs.

In Italy, about 50,000 to 70,000 women every year are trafficked from East Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Between 30 percent to 40 percent of those are minors, between ages 14 and 18, Bonetti wrote in *Making Waves*, an ecumenical journal.

"Many of these women, reduced to slavery and used by millions of Italian consumers—90 percent of whom are Catholic—come from countries previously evangelized by missionaries," wrote Bonetti, who was a missionary in Africa for 24 years and now travels around the world speaking out against commercial sexual exploitation.

Freidman believes the church has a long way to go before understanding the psychological chains of sexual slavery.

"I was judged harshly by the church, and I went more than once seeking help," she said. "You don't know who to trust. I thought if I could go nowhere else, I could go to the church," but that wasn't the case.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA ACTION

At the 2005 Triennial Convention in San Antonio, Women of the ELCA adopted a resolution that calls for education and resources to assist women in combating commercial sexual exploitation both domesti-

cally and globally.

Carmen Richards, president of Women of the ELCA, was at the conference and was overwhelmed with the information. "I really think we have to educate ourselves on the subject and then teach others about it before we just jump in and try to fix it. I want us to think it through, then educate others, like the people in our Sunday school classes or Bible studies or other women's meetings."

Women of the ELCA is doing that on its Web site (www.womenoftheelca.org) and through resources like *A Day Full of Light: Ending Commercial Sexual Exploitation*, an introductory course that can be downloaded free from the Web site. The eight-page resource includes:

- Background on commercial sexual exploitation and why Women of the ELCA is involved in the effort to end it;
- Action steps for *A Day Full of Light*;
- Worship resources;
- A list of resources on the subject;
- A Web site link to a list of other resources on sexual exploitation of children (CSEC); and
- A list of ministries that work to address the critical challenge of CSE and CSEC. 🌿

Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Attend an Act Boldly event near you

Women of the ELCA is offering Act Boldly events across the country this year to help you discover your boldness and explore how you can put it into action. Scheduled for three weekends in five cities, the events are April 27–28 in Austin, Texas; May 18–19 in Renton, Washington, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and September 28–29 in Omaha, Nebraska, and Washington, D.C.

The Act Boldly events begin on Friday evening with a banquet that celebrates community—a great reason to bring a group from your congregation. On Saturday, you will hear bold stories and meet the bold women who have lived them. You'll leave Saturday knowing how to act boldly on your faith in Jesus Christ and how you can mobilize other women to do the same.

For more information, visit www.womenoftheelca.org.

Prayers you've probably never thought of

In *Simple Prayers for Complicated Lives*, author Jennifer Phillips offers unique prayers of lament and thanksgiving. Have you ever been assaulted or robbed? Did you later pray for the person who hurt you? This pint-sized prayer book offers one such petition, with a caveat: “when one is ready.”

Then there's a prayer for stiff bones. “God my center and strength in pain: lift me up today when I can hardly lift myself.” The prayer asks for perseverance and courage to move, then shifts into a celebration for the body parts

that do work. Phillips suggests that we “celebrate the strength, the mobility, the gifts that [we] have, rather than to count [our] losses and limitations.”

If you want to thank God for your drive-through hamburger, there is a prayer for fast food in this book. Are you thankful for your computer? For its ingenuity, for the connections it brings? She's got a prayer for it.

She includes prayers for mornings, work and home, evenings, births, parents and children, assaults and intrusions, and mixed blessings. Phillips, an Episcopal priest and hospital chaplain, suggests that you tape one of these prayers to your mirror or tuck one in your child's book bag. Order *Simple Prayers for Complicated Lives* (Seabury Books, 2006) on-line from www.amazon.com or check with your local bookstore.

Celebrate diversity in California, July 12-15

The ELCA, in partnership with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA), is sponsoring a first-time conference, *Spirit of Wholeness in Christ: A Racial Ethnic Multicultural Event*. The family-oriented event is set for July 12–15 in Los Angeles, California. Celebrate diversity, take advantage of learning opportunities, become equipped to minister in diverse settings, participate in multicultural and racial ethnic ministry settings, and experience multicultural worship, music, and dance. For more information, call Rosemary Dyson, 800-638-3522, ext. 2832.



RACE NOTES

Praying Women

Linda Post Bushkofsky



It was 1985 and I had

been asked to put together a prayer vigil for the women of my congregation. This was my first responsibility in the women's organization and I wanted to do it right. Since I was just out of graduate school, part of "doing it right" meant research, so I asked the pastor and the seminary intern at my congregation if I could borrow their books about prayer. They responded with blank stares. They had books *containing* prayers, but no books *about* prayer and praying. Times have changed! A search of an Internet bookseller now turns up over 200,000 books with "prayer" in the title.

I've led workshops all over our church to help women explore the breadth and depth of an active prayer life. All my reading has led me to many pithy quotes that help me in my prayer life. An oft-quoted saying of Meister Eckhart, a German theologian of the Middle Ages, is "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was 'thank you,' that would suffice." This reminds me a bit of St. Paul's admonition to the Colossians: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2, NIV). Or, as paraphrased in *The Message*, "Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude."

Often we get so caught up in intercessory prayers that we fail to give thanks to our Creator. I encourage you to pause each day to offer prayers of thanks to God. At your next unit gathering, consider having each participant list five things, people, creatures, or parts of

creation that she is thankful for and offer up a collective prayer of thanks.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and theologian of the last century, is quoted as saying "What I do is live. How I pray is breathe." Merton helps us see prayer as much more than words: it is, rather, the very essence of our lives. Martin Luther said it another way: "Prayer is everything the soul does in God's word." All that we do is part of our constant dialogue with God. Sometimes we're more cognizant of the dialogue than other times. I invite you to become more aware of your constant dialogue with God, pausing regularly to reflect on that dialogue. At your next unit gathering, spend some time talking about the ways in which you experience God without words.

The women of this organization are praying women. We pray in community: We begin our meetings with prayer, we end our Bible studies with prayer, we devote entire retreats to prayer. We pray individually: while walking, while knitting, upon waking and sleeping. We pray sequentially via prayer chains. We pray for people we know and people we don't know. We pray for individuals, for organizations, and for governments. So it may seem like preaching to the choir to close with Paul's charge to those living in Thessalonica, but here goes: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

the mission of Women of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America is to mobilize women to act
boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.



AMEN!

Dreaming and Doubt

by Catherine Malotky

I always have plans, God.

I have plans for my life, and for my family, and for the world. I have a vision, one rooted in what I imagine you desire for us all. I know that my power and influence are limited, but I yearn to contribute all I can to making your will and way come to bear in the world.

I suppose Jesus' disciples might have felt such an earnest desire to be a part of your work. Why else would they have abandoned their routines and followed him? Why else would they have risked so much to be with him, to try to learn from him, and, eventually, after he was gone, to interpret him and you to the world around them? I'll bet they had plans, too.

Their plans, like mine so often, meant little once it came down to actually living their lives. They often didn't understand what Jesus was up to. They tried to work it out, to become the followers they wanted to be. But Jesus was arrested and killed. The one on whom they had pinned their futures and the future of their community, was crucified, shamefully hung out in front of everyone as a common criminal.

My hopes and dreams are rarely so substantively destroyed. More often for me, it is a slow dissolve. One hope after another fails to come to pass. Doors don't open, or the doors that do open aren't quite what I had imagined. Periodically, I can become like the disciples cowering behind closed doors, wondering if all that hopeful vision was just a pipe dream. I've been around long

enough now. I don't live with dreams the way I did when I was a girl not yet launched into my life.

Yet, when I have fallen into such a place of diminished vision, you have borne me, God. I have laid out my heart before you and called on your name. You have called me back to your vision for the world, renewing me, responding in so many ways. You have spoken back through

- the love of my maturing daughters,
- the steadfastness of my mother,
- the reliability of the sunrise,
- the comfort of my dogs' velvety ears,
- a moment of progress,
- the transporting deliciousness of a ripe peach,
- the fresh odor of spring rain,
- the promise of an invitation,
- the starkness of an empty tomb, and
- the simplicity of bread and wine.

This is the miracle of prayer, God. You give me your name to call. You promise to hear me and to respond. I have plans, from my own limited vision of your goodness. You welcome them as glorious and incomplete as they are, and you bless me with growing wisdom even when I can hardly see or hear you at work, molding, fashioning, and weaving my dreams and hopes with those that spring up in the hearts of us all. Alleluia. Amen. 🌸

Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board Pensions as retirement planning manager. A ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



The Lutheran

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want to
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